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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000765

SIPDIS  
ANKARA FOR DEA CHRIS MELINK  
DEPARTMENT FOR INL ANDREW BUHLER  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/05/14

TAGS: PGOV PREL SNAR KCRM PINR AF UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: COUNTERNARCOTICS MEETINGS INDICATE ENGAGEMENT  
WITH DEA IS STILL POSSIBLE

REF: TASHKENT 479

CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy P. Buckley, Second Secretary, Department of  
State, Political and Economic Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 7, the Ankara-based Drug Enforcement  
Administration (DEA) Country Attaché and poloff accepted an  
invitation to tour the National Canine Center, which is operated by  
the State Customs Committee. On May 8 meetings were held with  
representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the  
National Center for Drug Control. The tone of the meetings was  
positive, and the DEA Country Attaché delivered a convincing  
presentation about how resuming cooperation would benefit  
Uzbekistan in terms of intelligence-sharing - particularly  
regarding Afghanistan - and training opportunities. These working  
level officials are clearly interested in resuming cooperation with  
DEA, especially now that there is a greater potential for sorely  
needed information on Afghanistan, but they are reluctant to  
converse without an elusive green light about DEA from the highest  
political level. End Summary.

Invitation to Canine Center

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¶2. (SBU) On May 7, visiting DEA Country Attaché (still based  
offshore) and poloff followed up on an invitation to visit the  
National Canine Center on the outskirts of Tashkent, which is  
operated by the State Customs Committee. The Director, Sobirjan  
Minovarov, had extended the invitation as a goodwill gesture after  
three of his officers, including the Deputy Director, participated  
in a regional conference in Almaty with support of INL funds  
(reftel). Minovarov comes across as a no-nonsense cop who demands  
high performance and earns respect from his officers. He took  
particular pride that the World Customs Organization accredited his  
center last year, the culmination of a three-year inspection  
process by five certifying experts. It is an impressive facility,  
indeed, with a 75-bed on-site hotel for participants, 100 dog  
kennels with warm and cold weather compartments, a puppy  
nursery/breeding facility, and training grounds complete with an

aircraft, bus, and other vehicles for conducting realistic scenarios.

¶3. (SBU) Minovarov noted that the center offers specific training programs for dogs and handlers in narcotics, explosives, person identification, anti-terrorism tactics, and rescue operations. The facility has hosted seven regional programs under the auspices of the UN and on August 1 a program via the EU-funded Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) will train 25 regional participants. In addition to Central Asian states, the facility has trained Afghan officers (with UN and EU funding), and Iran and Mongolia requested and paid for training for its law enforcement officers directly. In addition to Uzbek Customs officers, the center provides training for approximately 75-80 Uzbek officers from other law enforcement agencies each year who operate their own canine units.

¶4. (SBU) Minovarov stressed the importance of trainees staying overnight on the premises, which ensures that they are up early to take proper care of their dogs. The Director himself says he is up and on duty every day at 5 AM. "The relationship between the handler and the dog," he stated, "is absolutely critical." Whenever possible the center tries to make a personality match and also find a suitable breed for the proposed work location. New officers are nominated from their own province and then come to Tashkent for the challenging training, and the Director does not hesitate to dismiss any officers not up to snuff.

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¶5. (C) There are currently 205 Customs officers deployed with canines in Uzbekistan, but at any given time there are 13 back in Tashkent for additional training or refresher courses, which all must undergo on at least an annual basis for two weeks. The initial course of training is four months, and their field performance is closely monitored. The first time officers return from the field with their dogs for assessment is vital, according to the Director, as staff often identify crucial problems such as officers who share table food with their dogs, thereby hurting fitness levels and diminishing their keen sense of smell. Minovarov also described extensive use of metrics, as the center analyzes seizures by region and with peer groups. "For example, if I see an officer posted in Surkhandarya near the Tajik border who finds only negligible amounts of narcotics, then I know he is not properly doing his job...especially if his peers are finding substantially more."

¶6. (SBU) The center has successfully expanded its breeding program after receiving five German shepherd puppies from Europe a few years ago. To date, 83 puppies have been born at the facility and many have met the selection criteria to be put through the training regimen. The puppies are housed in a separate kennel area and are well-cared for by attendants and veterinarians. Minovarov capped off the tour with live demonstrations of narcotics detection techniques and an impressive anti-terror scenario in which padded actors fired blank rounds and the dogs were unleashed to neutralize the suspects.

Meeting with Counternarcotics Officials

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¶7. (C) On May 8, DEA Country Attaché and poloff met with Shokirjon Inogamov, Chief of the Counter-Drug Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Shohruh Ulugkhodjaev from the MVD's Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU), Djamol Kholmirzaev, Deputy Chief of the Counter-Drug Department, and a representative from the

National Center for Drug Control. A formal request had been submitted weeks in advance, but the meeting was confirmed only the day before, and the National Security Service declined a request to meet with the DEA representative. MVD is always reticent to meet without permission, but once the MFA provides the green light they express goodwill and eagerness to cooperate. Inogamov described Uzbek concern over the northern route from Afghanistan, particularly the border area towns of Bekobod in Tashkent Province, Urgut in Samarkand Province, and numerous points on the rugged areas of Surkhandarya Province bordering Tajikistan. He was proud that more than two tons of narcotics were seized in 2008, and he added "without close cooperation, it is difficult to achieve results." Inogamov then noted that Uzbekistan has lots of questions about Afghanistan, including the harvest, production statistics, and information about laboratories. "Of course, we have our own channels, but we'd like to hear from you."

¶8. (C) Inogamov's remarks were a perfect segue into the DEA Country Attache's presentation, during which he delivered convincing reasons for why a DEA presence would benefit Uzbekistan. A key selling point is the prospect of greater intel-sharing on Afghanistan, especially as DEA ramps up the number of agents on the ground who are gathering information and building relationships. DEA also is in a position, as before, to offer Uzbek counterparts

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training programs and networking opportunities, such as the recent participation of an NSS officer at a regional International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in St. Petersburg, Russia, which generated positive feedback. (Note: Disappointingly, the Government of Uzbekistan then turned down a follow up offer to send officers to a global IDEC in Cancun, although the Country Attache reiterated the invitation. End note.) DEA also proposed study tours to the southern U.S. border region and even to Kabul to network with counterparts. DEA is also expanding its presence elsewhere in Central Asia, and the Country Attache explained that it makes sense for Uzbekistan to be engaged in the middle when DEA is expanding operations in Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Almaty, and Russia. Finally, the Uzbeks were given an overview of the U.S. 960 law, which allows for possible prosecution in the United States of foreign nationals who provide material support to designated terrorist organizations. Thus, a lot of tangible benefits were put on the table, including a detailed presentation about narcotics trafficking trends and an offer of immediate sharing of intel involving Uzbek citizens.

"Very Interesting New Direction"

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¶9. (C) The MVD participants were certainly intrigued, and Inogamov commented that this was "a very interesting new direction" in a possible relationship with DEA. He welcomed the chance to receive operational intel from DEA, even right away, and said Uzbekistan would "initiate the appropriate processes." However, he then cited the need to channel any such information through the MFA, which is bureaucratic, unrealistic, and hampers efforts to develop direct working relationships among law enforcement officers. "Please, understand that we are eager to work together, and don't think we are hung up on bureaucracy," Inogamov explained. Yet it always comes down to fear, even among high-ranking police officials, of having unauthorized contact with foreigners. The Country Attache cited the existence of the 2002 Strategic Partnership Agreement between the U.S. and Uzbekistan, a valid but long forgotten legal framework, which stipulates that counternarcotics is an area for mutual cooperation. The Uzbek officials had not seen the document and promised to pursue this as a legal basis for establishing communication on their end, so long as the U.S. side - as usual - initiates the process with another diplomatic note.

¶10. (C) Inogamov stated that "MVD is voting for DEA to return," but for the first time we heard an official concede that, although they always appreciated getting equipment and training via DEA during its prior era of cooperation with Uzbekistan, he said they were disappointed about the lack of information flowing from the American side. This message was different from previous visits. The DEA Country Attache explained that at that time Uzbekistan had been its only outpost in the region and information networks in Afghanistan were not fully developed; hence, this is a major selling point about why Uzbekistan would gain from renewed cooperation now. Furthermore, the DEA Country Attache was approached by third-country law enforcement officers at a regional event in Tashkent about facilitating operational exchange of information with the Uzbeks, which demonstrates the liaison role that DEA can also play in Uzbekistan.

Hesitation to Get Too Close

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¶11. (C) Subsequent attempts to engage these MVD officials over the next week were not fruitful, which again illustrates that fear keeps these law enforcement officials from having unauthorized contact with Americans, even when it is in their professional interest to develop networks and regularly communicate. The officials did not follow up as promised to organize a subsequent meeting while the DEA Country Attache was in town. The Embassy contacted the MVD repeatedly and on May 13 was told that Inogamov was out of town. His subordinates confided to our LES on the phone about apparent excuse-making that "look, we just cannot meet without official authorization" and mentioned their fear of disciplinary action or even prosecution. Nonetheless, the DEA Country Attache was able to pass operational information to Uzbek law enforcement officials who attended a UNODC-organized precursor event.

Comment:

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¶12. (C) We are continuing our patient efforts to engage the Government of Uzbekistan on counternarcotics issues, although we are at a loss to explain its reluctance to get too close given its genuine concern about narcotics trafficking through its territory. The invitation to the Customs Canine Center demonstrates that INL-organized trips - even modest ones to send three people to neighboring Kazakhstan for a few days - generate goodwill and open doors to us. DEA has done all it can to lay out convincing reasons for why a resumption of cooperation is in our mutual interests, and we will have to see if these fresh presentations filter the message to the top. First Deputy Foreign Minister Karamatov - if the Uzbeks accept the schedule - will have a high-level meeting in Washington next week at DEA Headquarters, which will be an opportunity to assess where the Government of Uzbekistan stands on accrediting the DEA Country Attache.

¶13. (U) Visiting DEA Country Attache Chris Melink has cleared this telegram.

NORLAND